

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

ST. NICHOLAS, LIVERPOOL,

MDCCLXXXVI.

1787

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PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS,

ON WEDNESDAY MAY THE NINTH, MDCCCLXXXVII,

AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE TRUSTEES

OF THE

INFIRMARY IN LIVERPOOL.

BY THE REV. THOMAS HUNTER,

VICAR OF WEAVERHAM IN CHESHIRE, and CHAPLAIN to his
Grace the Duke of ATHOL.

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THOMAS TARLETON, Esq.

THE PRESIDENT,

AND THE OTHER TRUSTEES OF THE

LIVERPOOL INFIRMARY,

THIS DISCOURSE, PUBLISHED

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE CHARITY,

UNDER THEIR IMMEDIATE PATRONAGE,

I S,

WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT,

INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

THOMAS TAYLOR, ESQ.

THE PRESIDENT

AND THE OTHER TRUSTEES OF THE

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THE subject of public charity though important is not novel ; whilst its occurrence is as regular as the revolution of the year. Its arguments are long since exhausted : and so many good things have been said upon it, that there remain none better in reserve. Nor does the author of the following discourse hold out any such pretensions.

A deference to the public opinion, a respect to the urgent, though, perhaps, partial, representations of his friends, a wish to accommodate the curiosity of those, who, at the time of its delivery, were so situated, as to be out of the possibility of hearing, and, he hopes, that he may, without vanity add, a desire to promote the interests of a most benevolent establishment are motives to the present publication which he found it impossible to resist.

THE object of the present inquiry is to ascertain the extent to which the various departments of the Government are able to furnish the necessary information for the purpose of the present inquiry. It is to be observed that the information furnished by the various departments is not always complete, and is often of a very general nature. It is, however, the duty of the Government to furnish the necessary information for the purpose of the present inquiry, and it is the duty of the various departments to furnish the necessary information for the purpose of the present inquiry.

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S E R M O N, &c.

JOHN v. 2, 3.

Now there is, at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having five porches. In these, lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

I. **T**HE group of afflicted objects pourtrayed in the text presents a hideous, but actual, view of human wretchedness. Wide is the domain, and terrible are the devastations of calamity. But this is not all. Its effects, too, are remarkable for their violence, their variety,

and their duration. Our frame, though mortal, often maintains a stubborn conflict with disease, and death, generally, achieves his conquests, only, by slow and intermitted approaches. The citadel of life supports a tedious storm; and it is, mostly, by repeated shocks of battery, that the fatal breach is finally effected.

To these alarming shocks we are, all of us, every moment, liable. The materials of disease are diffused throughout the species: and however we may wish to doubt, or attempt to wrangle, respecting our *other* innate propensities, we must all of us acknowledge, that our tendency to *decay* is indisputably native. From the attacks of ill health, and the peril of accidental injury, no verdure of age, no vigour of constitution, no superfluity of wealth, no eminence of office can plead exemption. On the contrary, besides those epidemic complaints which affect the human race in general, every period of life, every degree of rank, every kind of constitution, and, almost, every class of employment has *its*

own attendant train of disorders. Different and voluminous dissertations have been written, by the ingenious and observant physician, on the distinct complaints of men of different occupations, and separate treatises have been made public on the tendency of particular habits to particular ailments. From this representation then, and surely, it is not overcharged, the ravage of disease appears incessant; and on the bed of sickness thousands each day, fall beside us, and ten thousand at our right hand.

But, amidst the different classes into which mankind have been divided, the inferior orders are, without doubt, the greatest sufferers. *Their* affliction assumes an infinity of malignant shapes. Their sorrows accumulate. In health their portion is bitter; but in sickness, severe and overwhelming. In short, the historical anecdote of the text describes no rare or solitary incident. It is now, as it was of old. Any provincial district, any town, and almost any village, can furnish forth a circle of like disastrous aspect and infirmities.

firmities. The sickly porches of affliction, at this hour, exhibit the same ruthless diversity of anguish. The salutary influence of the angel of health is still wanted. We too have *our great multitude of blind, of halt, of withered*; and untold numbers lie anxiously expecting *the moving of the waters* of benevolence and pity.

II. The miserable crowd of Bethesda were not, however, without a resource of hope: nor were they left to lament their hapless allotment in irremediable despair. *An angel*, the sacred narrative proceeds to say, *an angel went down at a certain season.*

To do good, it must be allowed, is, *never*, either out of time, or out of place. There is a propriety, there is a grace, there is a charm in beneficence, which renders it, *always*, in season. Still, it is a point of fact, that there are some exigencies more pressing, some objects more necessitous, and therefore some occasions of compassion more opportune and graceful than others; and, you will not suspect me of any indelicacy of insinuation,

insinuation, when I only say, that this observation applies, with peculiar aptness, to the present respectable assembly, and to the occasion of it.

For it was an occasion of this very sort, you hear, which drew the attention, and attracted the descent, of *an angel from heaven*. *An angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.*

Compassion, condescension, accommodation of temper, susceptibility of feeling, and all the benignant emotions are the surest indications of the best hearts; as they are, oftentimes, the result of more enlarged views, and superior endowments. This you observe, was the case in the instance before us. In heavenly beings no morose selfishness, and no obduracy of heart can harbour. The principles by which the conduct of celestial beings is actuated, next to a zeal for *the glory of God*, are *peace, good will towards men*. With their friendly regards,

regards, and good wishes we are made acquainted, and they are represented in scripture as interested, rejoicing, and even taking an active part in the welfare of mankind.

It was, formerly, as it is at *present*, the plan of the divine proceedings, *to carry on his operations by intermediate methods*. God delights to work by *second causes*; and amongst others, *he maketh*, we are told, *his angels ministers*. On this occasion, in particular, they were the known dispensers of his bounty, and communicated amazing virtues to the agitated waters.

Behold then, and profit by this example. You see, here, brethren, *your* calling also. You, too, in like manner, are called to the high honour of being the almoners of his providence, the distributors of his bounty, the *angels or messengers* of his ministration. You are invited to share with him and the angelic host, in the heavenly employment *of doing good*. You are summoned by your Lord to the same godlike service; and you are commissioned to relieve the wants, to bind
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up the wounds, to mitigate the pains, and to take tender interest in the health, the ease, and comfort of all who want your compassionate offices.

And, surely, the Master of the world has a right to expect your entire compliance with his requisitions. He made you what you are, and what you have he gave. Nor has he left you in the hands of your own council. Of you and of yours, he has still reserved the final disposal to himself. You have here no certain permanency, and consequently no actual possession. The whole world is his. The property in your hands is merely consigned to your management. You are literally his agents, to be retained at his pleasure or dismissed at any moment. And happy will it be for you, when you are called to give an account of the execution of your commission, or stewardship, if you shall be found to have pursued his plans, seconded his views, and applied his capital to the purposes of his destination.

III. That these purposes are of the most *benevolent* nature we are enabled to collect,
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not only from the miraculous and medicinal commotion of the water, but from the farther progress of the sacred story before us. The descending angel was not the only celestial being, who had the goodness to pity and relieve the patients, who crowded the buildings of the heavenly medicated pool, in Jerusalem.

All the sweet affections influenced him, also, in whom *dwelt all the fulness of the godhead bodily*, our Lord, and the Lord of angels. His heart melted, and his eyes frequently overflowed, with commiseration; and he gave amiable and unequivocal proof of the tenderest and most exquisite sensibility. He was really the friend; he was actually the *physician* of the poor. His provision reached, and his assiduities extended, both to their spiritual and temporal distresses. To their sicknesses and sores, both of body and of mind, he was equally attentive. His attachment to misery was uniform and undeviating. He pursued it to its obscurest retreats, and anxiously explored its most wretched receptacles. This benevolent

benevolent spirit urged him on the present occasion, and, with unparalleled humility, we find him giving personal attendance, and mingling with the Lazars in the porches of Bethesda.

Amongst these, *there was a certain man which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.* Here was a case altogether distressing and peculiar. This poor cripple had been, long and severely, disciplined in the school of affliction. Secluded from the more cheerful haunts of men, a stranger to agility of motion; and all the refreshing pleasures resulting from purer air and manly toil, he was fixed down, in torpid inaction, to the same fordid corner; where he lay a painful incumbrance to himself, and, perhaps, a nuisance obnoxious to his neighbours. His condition, too, was the more deplorable, because it was, *apparently*, hopeless. Justly is it said, that *hope deferred maketh the heart sick.* This man had to combat with the complicated evils of confinement, disorder, and despair. Ill-fated sufferer! To be compelled to live within
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the constant view, and yet completely out of the reach, of remedy! His infirmity, whatever it was, rendered him utterly unable to avail himself of the precious, but fleeting, moments of relief. His hopes were always called forth, but always defeated. For another, still outstripped his tardy efforts, and seized the happy opportunity before him.

All these things were against him; and his condition, on every account, was as *extraordinary*, as it was deplorable. In the estimation of charity, the most urgent necessity is the first recommendation, and the greatest misery has the strongest claim to mercy. The benevolent Jesus, then, exhibited his usual penetration, in the selection of this miserable object, for the display of his healing power. And, after a short address, tending to prepare his patient for the joyful issue which impended, and to rouse the attention of the spectators to a public miracle, he said unto him, *Rise, take up thy bed and walk: and immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked.*

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We have, here, you see, a very *particular* cure effected in a very *particular* manner. This sufferer was so circumstanced, that, he could not embrace the *usual* methods of recovery; and without the *industrious* intervention of some friendly hand, he must have lingered out an useless and irksome existence. What, therefore, he could not procure for himself, our Lord, compassionately, accomplished for him. And is not this another *Example* to encourage the design, and to confirm and support the Institution, which is the occasion of our present *convention*? We are hence taught, that where common means fail, *uncommon* ones must be adopted. The wants and weaknesses of our fellow-men require this *extraordinary* attention, and point to this very conduct. It is a melancholy truth, that thousands lie in as *helpless* a state as the *impotent* man in the gospel. There are cases to which the *legal* provision for the poor will not extend. There are *sufferers* for whose accommodation and recovery there is, and can be, no *Parochial* relief. There are *maladies* which baffle the attempts

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of a *single* Professor of Physic, and which demand the aid of better experience, maturer skill, and combined consultation. And without medical Establishments upon the broad basis of *public* contribution, and *public* admission, all these would be left to perish *unpitied and unrelieved*. Surely, the very genius of our religion reprobates such inhumanity, and the *uncommon* and *stupendous* methods adopted by heaven, to accomplish our Redemption hold out an awful lesson, and form a personal and striking demonstration, to every man, of the necessity, the nature, and the extent of compassion.

Upon the whole, this short evangelical narrative leads to observations which are apposite, interesting, and important; and furnishes out an example perfectly in point with the subject of this day. It describes to you an Institution, in its *object* exactly resembling your own. It proves to you the existence of a structure, reared for the very purposes of your *Infirmery*; and it describes that Establishment, as proceeding under

under the Auspices of GOD himself, as attended by a *commissioned Angel*, and honoured with the *Presence* and the *Power* of his SON.

God, you see, then, as well as now, brought his benevolent purposes to bear, by the instrumentality of *other* agents. It is of no consequence that the *means differ*, where the *effect* is the same. He invested his angel with the power of communicating health in *one* way: and he has given you the opportunity and the faculty of doing the same thing in another. Not that he *needs* these services either of men or of angels. He is, evidently, himself sufficient for all these things. He has, already, done much towards their completion; but, at the same time, has left much to your co-operation. He himself supplies the waters of health, but he requires that *you should administer* them. The cordials and the medicines are his: but he expects that *you should select* and *dispense* them. The bath of Bethesda he has prepared. *A great multitude of blind, of halt, of withered*, stand in need of

its restorative virtues. But they are impotent. In helpless wretchedness they lie. *They are unable to step down, and they have no man to put them in.* This, then, is *your* part. On you they cast an imploring eye. To you they extend their feeble hands. To you they address the most importunate entreaties. By the sanctions of religion, and by the ties of nature, by the awful obligations of duty, and by the urgent impulse of
 • pity, you are called to this blessed office.

You cannot, indeed, heal the sick by a touch, or by a word, as your Saviour did the cripple in the buildings of Bethesda. But you can send your representatives, the messengers of *comfort* the ministers of *health* the welcome *Physicians* into the porches of *your* Bethesda, into the apartments of your *House of Mercy*, and you can commission them to apply such remedies, as will enable them to say to the poor perishing *patients*, “Unhappy men! rise
 “from your beds and walk. Return to
 “your families and friends, and tell them
 “what

"what great things God hath done for
"you."

IV. Nay you can do more than this. You can say as our Lord did to this impotent man, *Go and sin no more.* The season of sickness is peculiarly favourable to religious impressions. It shews us the vanity of life, and the unstable ground which supports our footing. It operates in the mode of penal castigation, and forms, of all others, the most perfect penitentiary process.

A sparing regimen, separate confinement, and alternate labour are the modern and improved methods discovered for the correction and emendation of criminals. And is not *this* the actual scheme and the procedure of *Providence* with mankind? Does not sickness, *his* infliction seclude them from social intercourse, and effectually chain them down to the same uneasy cell? Are not they left, in this state, to profit by the wholesome musings of solitary *recollection*? And is not the *conscience at leisure* to learn experience from the uncontrolled

action of *remorse*? In distress the soul finds comfort in devotion. The dereliction of the world points all its energies to heaven. In this state, the admonition and prayers of an attendant Clergyman, with the perusal of a few plain and pious books have been followed by the happiest consequences.

Mankind seem to have been lately taught by *experience* what they were too inattentive to learn from *theory*, and too incredulous to take upon trust from *Revelation*. It is this: that want of principle leads to practices subversive of all order and happiness; and that RELIGION alone can do, what neither the sentence of the Magistrate, nor the act of the executioner have been able to accomplish. The bulk of mankind are bred in ignorance, and matured in error. Every occasion of removing these is, therefore, to be earnestly sought after, and eagerly embraced. This occasion, which an *Infirmity* always offers, is one argument, amongst many, to evince its superiority to all other medical Institutions. It not only regards the good of the individual, but of *society*. It not only attends to the bodily, but

out to the *spiritual* improvement of its patients. It is a *Dispensary*: and, if licence be allowed the word, it is a REFORMATORY likewise.*

V. And surely *they are worthy*, to whom you are required to extend these advantages. The lives of the lowest are as dear, and their souls are as precious, in the eye and affection of the universal Father, as that

* This mode of charity affords opportunity for the display of another social duty, and it is perfectly evangelic on occasions of this sort, to *let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven*. Charity is not to be discouraged in any mode whatsoever. Unknown contributors have, no doubt, private motives for the concealment of their names. But where the miseries of man, and the honour of God require our interference, there can be no real *reason* for diffidence, and no absolute *necessity* for disguise. The example of our Saviour inculcates a different doctrine. By the miracle of healing, which we have considered, he broke through the most rigid forms of *Ceremony*, and dissolved the strongest scruples of *Superstition*. For he performed it *publicly*: and he performed it on the *sabbath day*.

of him who graces a throne. In the estimation of God, outward distinctions and decorations are of no moment. We, fallible creatures, are struck by external appendages. He sees with other eyes, and judges by a juster criterion. Let us deliberate with honest impartiality upon the claims of the poor, and weigh their merits in an equal balance. Consider then, the necessary connection between you, reckon up their *services*, and hear the demands which even *justice* gives them, upon your munificence.

They labour that you may rest; and by their fatigues your fortune is even now accumulating. They build, they navigate your vessels. They take out, they bring home your merchandise. They raise your villas, they enlarge your streets, they point the turrets of your churches. In short, their manual labour effects every rapid improvement of this increasing Place. These are some of their *Performances*; but listen likewise to their *SUFFERINGS* in your service.

Exposed, by their various employments, to the intense influence of the elements; subject,

ject, in the same scanty apparel, to the sudden vicissitudes of heat and cold; immersed in subterraneous mines, or half suffocated in columns of smoke, in clouds of steam, or exhalations of dry vapour, they are, almost continually, liable to accidents and injury. They encounter many a danger, they hazard their limbs, and they oftentimes sacrifice their lives, to procure you the means of enjoyment in health; it is scarce equitable, then, that they should be refused a temporary alleviation of distress, during *sickness*. Their days of health form a series of *drudgery and care*: let not then their hours of *pain* be without their consolations.

In a state even of *Affluence*, affliction is an intolerable attendant. The torrid violence of a fever renders even a bed of down, a bed of torture: and sickness, soothed with the most endearing tenderness, supported by every artificial comfort, and counteracted by the best exertions of the best medical skill and acquirements, is a condition, both distressing to contemplate, and difficult to endure. But when POVERTY is added to
 pain,

pain, and INDIGENCE to disease, HEAVY is the stroke, and dire the calamity, indeed. And yet the flesh of the poor is as vulnerable, and their feelings as acute as *yours*; whilst they neither possess that stock of principle, which your happier education has supplied; nor are armed with the same acquired fortitude of mind, to support them under the paroxysms of disease, and the grievous pressure of calamity.

You now, perhaps, exult in robust health, and bask in the ray of fortune. But nothing is more mutable than either. Many a rich man has hailed the dawn, and found himself a beggar ere the setting sun. We are, one hour, delirious with pleasure, and the next with pain. We are, this day, pushing our projects with all the ardour of industry or avarice, and the next, we and all our schemes are arrested by some fell disorder. With the sick whom we neglect, and the poor whom we despise, we are liable, almost any hour, to change conditions. Whether they would refuse us a temporary donation, to beguile the cheerless

less hours of penury, and to mitigate the throbbings of anguish, were they in our station, we are not certain. But of this we cannot doubt, that such treatment we should think most merciless, were we in theirs.

But I will suppose that you have, and that you shall, through life, enjoy health of body unimpaired, and opulence of condition undiminished. Yet after all, permit me to ask, can you, in like manner rejoice in the health and soundness of your *other and better part*? Can you say that your *Innocence* is *uninjured*? Is your *Peace* *unwounded*? And is your *Conscience* without a *scar*? Have you contracted no *immoral infection*? And are there no *spiritual disorders* under which you labour, and from which you would wish to be relieved?

Consider then Christianity as an august and ample *Dispensary*, the Saviour of the world as the presiding *Physician*, and Grace as the universal *Remedy*, for every complaint of the soul. And, O! if you are sensible of any unsound part in *your moral constitution*,

constitution; if through any *infirmity or impotence of passion*, you want strength, or through any *relapse into ill conduct*, re-establishment; in short, if you smart under the secret anguish of any *guilty sore*, or are harrassed by any wounds and bruises of *conscience, which have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment*; if, in this alarming view of things, *you yourselves* become *patients*, and stand in need of healing; then afford that relief, and shew that favour to the *bodies* of your fellow-creatures, which you will desire, from your Maker, to your *soul*. Then the mercy you wish to receive, *extend* to others: and the pity you will want, *bestow*.

The liberal terms upon which salvation is offered should inspire us with a liberal spirit. Look upon the scheme of Redemption as another Bethesda, constructed for the reception and recovery of the *spiritually diseased*. Here is a divine *fountain* opened to wash away the stains, to *purify* the pollutions, and to *heal the disorders*, of a fallen world. Here flow those celestial waters which can alone renovate and re-establish
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the spiritual habit. To these balsamic streams the access is free, and the admission wholly gratuitous. To these you are invited to come without money, and without price. The words of the great and generous founder are, Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. The inference then, is equally just and striking. The liberal treatment you have experienced, exhibit. Freely ye have received, freely give.

But, in vain I protract this discourse, to prompt you to encourage a charity, which you have, hitherto, supported with so laudable an ardour. The generosity of this place has ever extended with its extending commerce. Amidst your many other charitable foundations, there is little danger that you should be unmindful of one, which was formed and fostered by your *Ancestors*, under circumstances of inferior opulence and population. A pious respect to their memory, an attachment to the scene of your early and your prosperous days, the high rank you take as a commercial people, the consequence this thriving Port bears
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in the estimation of all Europe, the necessity there is for a receptacle for those who have suffered in your immediate service,—all these, I am sensible, will be permanent incentives to the support of your INFIRMARY: whilst that proper spirit of emulation, which urges you to activity and arduous enterprize in trade, will never suffer you to see an Institution decline, of that particular description, which is generously supported, even in places of subordinate wealth and celebrity.

I acknowledge these are but motives of an inferior order. You have a right, and you will do well, *to have respect to the recompense of eternal reward.* May he then who can influence your hearts, and bend your actions to his good pleasure, multiply and note down your charities in the book of his remembrance. May he approve, and reward them, in the assembly of men and angels. At that awful juncture, may the *blessing of him that was ready to perish, come upon you, and the rich effect of the bread which you have cast upon the waters, may*
you

you *find after many days*. May he, who has promised that the least and the lowest exertions of charity shall, by no means, lose their reward, receive you into his own *Mansions of Mercy*; where you shall never more see pain in others, or experience it in yourselves; where you shall know neither sorrow, nor sickness, nor death any longer; but where you shall flourish in unfading health, and triumph in the everlasting *joy* of your LORD.

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